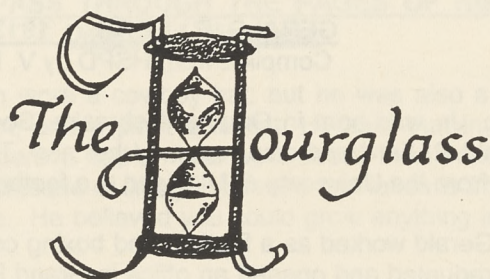


Historical Society of Palm Desert

P.O. Box 77

Palm Desert, CA 92261

(760) 346-6588



Community
Service
Collections
Archives

SPRING 2007

VOL. 14, NO. 1

JEAN BENSON Pioneer in Palm Desert Politics

Compiled from HSPD archives by V. Folkers

Jean became a resident of Palm Desert in 1969, four years before the city incorporated in 1973. She worked as manager of the Anderson Travel Agency, becoming well-known and respected by the local citizens. After 20 years in the business, she retired in May of 1995. Moving even further back into her life story, we find that Jean is a veteran who served in the United States navy Waves during World War II.

The City of Palm Desert was incorporated in the November 1973 election, when the pros finally defeated the cons. Jean Benson didn't let any grass grow under her feet when she ran for a seat on the city council. In fact, she was the only woman on the council until just recently. Serving from 1973 to 1975, Jean was there to help organize the government and iron out some of the wrinkles that had developed over the years. Then in 1984 she was reelected and she still holds the position of City Councilperson.

The residents of Palm Desert hold the City Council in high regard. One of the reasons for this is that the individual members of this august group have mutual respect for each other, so there have rarely been items in the local newspapers about infighting over issues. Citizens' pride also stems from the fact that the council keeps a careful eye on the city's pocketbook. Financial solvency is maintained by their policy of accumulating at least enough for an additional year of operation in case of an emergency.



It is well-known that Jean's heart is with the children of the community when it comes to child care organizations. This triggered her desire when she became the founding president of the Coachella Valley Child Care Council. When the child care center at the Desert Rose development was built, the facility was named after Jean. This is only one of the awards she has garnered during her busy life in Palm Desert. She has also received the Athena award, the Chamber of Commerce George Berkey Award, and twice the Soroptimist's gave her the Women of Distinction Award.

In working with the city, Jean has done stints on the Planning Commission, the Redevelopment Agency, the Design Review Board, and Rent Review. As a City Council representative she has worn many hats over the years. Some of these were the Desert Library Zone, Retail Business advisory, and city committees for investment, promotion, golf course oversight, charity contributions, Committee/Commission appointments, and last but not least -- the Historical Society of Palm Desert.

Should you consider the list long enough....please consider C.V.A.G. committees, Riverside County, Palm Springs Visitor & Convention Bureau, Palm Springs Regional Airport, Children's Discovery Museum, Bighorn Institute, McCallum Theatre Board, American Cancer Society, Friends of the Mountains Conservancy, Palm Desert Women's Club, Desert Symphony Association, and Palm Desert Chamber of Commerce. Also, Jean is an honorary member of Angel View, Foundation for the Retarded of the Desert, National Charity League, and she holds local honors from various other organizations.

On March 19 the Palm Desert Rotary Club will honor Jean Benson as the "Citizen of the Year." Many of her loyal friends will attend the dinner and ceremony held at Desert Willow. Has any other woman in Palm Desert dedicated so many years of her life for the good of the residents?

GERALD R. FORD 1913 - 2006

Compiled from HSPD by V. Folkers

In 1913 Leslie Lynch King, Jr. was born in Omaha, Nebraska. Soon afterward his parents divorced. His mother remarried in 1916 to Gerald R. Ford and also renamed her son. The boy was raised and educated in Michigan; and in 1935 he graduated from the University of Michigan -- a football star.

From 1935 through 1938 Gerald worked as a football and boxing coach at Yale University. He attended Yale Law Schools and in 1941 he graduated and opened an office in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The following year he joined the Navy and served on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific.

Gerald's political career began in 1946 when he was elected to the House of Representatives from the Grand Rapids District; and was subsequently re-elected 12 times. Ford married Betty Warren in 1948 and they began a family, having three sons and one daughter.

In 1964 Gerald accepted a position on the Warren Commission to investigate the John F. Kennedy assassination. A year later he was chosen House Republican leader. President Richard Nixon appointed Ford to replace Vice-President Agnew in 1973. When Nixon resigned because of the "Watergate" scandal, Ford was sworn in as President in 1974. He served an 895-day presidency. The presidential election in 1976 was very close when Ford lost to Jimmy Carter. That's when Gerald and Betty Ford decided to retire to Rancho Mirage, California.



A Gerald R. Ford memoir was published in 1979 under the title, "A Time to Heal." Two years later the Gerald R. Ford Library was dedicated in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Why did the Fords decide on Rancho Mirage as a place to retire? Back in the 1960s they would spend the week after Easter every year in the desert. For them, Rancho Mirage was a place to unwind, to visit friends, and to play golf. So it was only natural that in November of 1976 they would come to see their friends Leonard Firestone and the Annenbergs. But the Fords were not rich; he had a pension of only \$90,500 per year. They built a 6,000-square foot ranch-style home in Thunderbird Country Club. Once they settled in, they became the toast of the town; they made the desert a better place. Gerald Ford was a physically powerful man with an equally strong character. Ralph Kiner, an local pioneer, said that Gerald was very easy-going and easy to talk to.

The Fords supported Eisenhower Medical Center, the Children's Discovery Museum, the Betty Ford Center, and the Bighorn Institute. They were involved with many charities, helped establish cultural institutions, and helped develop the Bob Hope Classic Tournament. He was on the McCallum board from inception to April 2004, helping to rescue it in a financial crisis. Gerald Ford was named honorary chairman in perpetuity. Ford has a special soft spot in his heart for the Gerald Ford Elementary School in Indian Wells. He would visit it often and converse with the students. You may not know that Gerald Ford was the man who coined the saying "Make My Day"; and Clint Eastwood used it in "Dirty Harry."

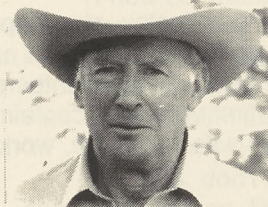
When we think that Gerald R. Ford, a former president of the United States, called the desert his home, it brings certain feelings of pride to us....but did we know him? Most of us would have to say "Not really." We saw him through the eyes of the media. After seeing hours of television about his life and work and reading all the newspaper articles, we may be able to change our response. His character, his honesty, his service, his love for his wife and family, his sense of humor, his energy in helping others gives us a better picture. He is Gerald (our) Ford!!!

Hall of Flame - Museum of Firefighting

While visiting Phoenix, Arizona Dick and Ginny Folkers went to see this amazing collection of 90 restored pieces of firefighting apparatus. Dating from 1725 through 1960 and originating from all over the world, this equipment was strange and wonderful, beautiful and very utilitarian, large and small. There were ladder trucks that seemed to be a mile long, and pumpers of the horse-drawn type that featured etched glass ...so ornate that you might expect to see them in an art museum. We experienced the history of firefighting, and also gained a better understanding of the pride that firefighters feel for their profession.

GREAT MEN PASS THROUGH THE PAGES OF HISTORY

Deceased Members



Paul Ames often wore a cowboy hat; but he was also a farmer, a real estate broker, a World War II pilot, and a plant scientist. He said that in order to leave footprints in the sands of time, a person had to wear work boots. Paul transformed the agricultural industry by inventing a technique of lining reservoirs and lakes to improve irrigation efficiency which spread worldwide.. He believed you could grow anything in the desert as long as you had water.

Joseph H. Lesser, M.D. was the first Medical Staff President of Eisenhower Medical Center from 1971 - 1973. His loyal service and progressive leadership were an inspiration to others even before the medical facility was built. He helped to develop the E.M.C. we know today.

Robert "Bob" Downs was a man who wore many hats. We know him historically to be the owner and operator of Keedy's Fountain & Grill for 10 years. He also owned Bob Downs Air Conditioning company for 30 years, was a member of the Palm Desert Planning Commission for 10 years, a benefactor to Washington School for 10 years, and a Marine from 1951 to 1954.

Richard "Dick" Soltys had an abiding interest in photography. He studied while in the navy and got experience with its missile programs. With a major in Cinema, he graduated from the University of Southern California, worked for two production companies, then he started his own. He directed and produced several films for large organizations before doing documentaries locally. When he "retired" to the desert in 1996, he authored two pictorial books. "Coachella Valley....Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" can be seen at Society headquarters.

...and a GREAT LADY

Opal Munster was a vibrant lady who was known to many in Palm Desert. For over 30 years she assisted Marian Henderson in conducting the business of "Desert Beautiful." A former resident of Palm Desert Country Club, her family plans to place a plaque at the Rose Garden there in her honor. Opal moved to Fullerton a few years ago as she was slowing down a little, though still walking every day, deep breathing, and eating a good diet. She was born on June 9, 1906 and died on new years day of 2007.

NEW MEMBERS

Individual: Ruth McLeon
Keith Edwards
Fred Montano
Kent Routh

Supporting: Jackie Lockington

Patron: Ruth Vega Norton

TWO GOLF CART PARADES IN 2007 ?

Jackie Damron gets credit for the theme "Wildly Historic" for decoration of the historic fire truck for the January 14 parade. She and Barbara Eastes cut and delivered palm fronds. All of the following volunteers gave time for decorating and securing stuffed animals: Don Graybill, Colleen Tebeau, Brett & Rose Romer, Dick Folkers, and Hal Rover also drove in the parade. The second parade will be held on Sunday, October 28.

BOARD MEETING SUMMARY

Jan. 17 - Finances discussed / Palm Desert Rotary Club's "Citizen of the Year" for Jean Benson at Desert Willow, table of 10 for \$2,000 / membership discussed & info packets / 52 hours donated to decorate the fire truck for the parade / theme for Mullins Picnic: T-Shirt Party, ask members to buy & wear Historical Society T-shirts, Keedy burgers is on the menu / Spring Luncheon at P.D. Country Club clubhouse is Cobb Salad, brownie with ice cream, \$22 per person / Brett Romer says we need a lot of fill on the Society web site / Piper Close, John Hussar & Doug Hosner will be interviewed for publicity work / Yard sale items are being stored on shelving constructed by Don Graybill, Barbara Eastes & Jackie Damron will start pricing, a separate tool sale was suggested, donation pickups will be scheduled for Mondays & Fridays / Directors & Officers liability insurance policy is in place / John Marman thanked the Society for supporting the Public Safety Awards ceremony / Sites for a new Society museum report submitted by Dick Folkers, City feels Sandpiper property would be best, Dick to do follow-up / Society's annual retreat on March 2 & 3 at Highland Springs Resort in Beaumont, with short visit to Edward-Dean Museum.

PALM DESERT'S FIRST FIRE STATION

Submitted by Jackie Damron

Early in 1948 Cliff Henderson contacted Riverside County's Fourth District Supervisor, Jim Easley, about opening a fire station in Palm Desert. The first fire engine was purchased from a local resident, an Indio auto dealer named Kay Olesen. The engine was war surplus and it cost the county \$500 "as is." The first chief of the volunteers was Bob Keedy, who later owned a coffee shop locally. Kay Olesen, Badge #13, was the first volunteer captain. The first paid Riverside County Fire Department employee was Lawrence Weingariner. His wife, Jeanette, worked at the Palm Desert Post Office for more than 25 years.

In 1950 the county started construction of the first permanent fire station on El Paseo on land donated by Clifford Henderson. The cost of \$6500 was for materials only, as the labor of county firemen was used to construct the building. Upon completion, it was the only structure west of Highway 74 and north of Haystack Road. Mr. Henderson then held a fund-raising event using his Shadow Mountain Club. Kay Olesen and Bob Keedy made arrangements with the comedy team of Olsen & Johnson to provide entertainment. Their hit road show at that time was "Hells-a-Poppin." The net profit from the event was \$2500. It was used to buy an E & J Resuscitator and furniture for the new fire station. Today the building houses the Historical Society of Palm Desert.

The people of Palm Desert are deeply indebted to Clifford Henderson for his generosity and dedication to the community. Thanks to his donation of land and his efforts on behalf of the citizens, fire protection was provided for the residents of Palm Desert.

THE COVE

(Chapter 2 of a manuscript titled "Free Land")

Written by Esther Schaak, a Cahuilla Hills pioneer

Verna and Olga were a contrast in light and shadow as the unloaded Verna's shabby car on their homestead claim. Verna's long blonde hair hung in braids below her waistline, and she walked with long firm strides. She wore heavy men's shoes and men's blue jeans, as she could find no pants in her size. In startling contrast to her male attire below the waist, she wore an off-the-shoulder white lace trimmed blouse underlaid with a delicate pink. It revealed her delicate, creamy skin and emphasized the large, attractive bosom ... like one of the huge 18th century angels portrayed by Rubens.

Olga had to run to keep up with her friend, and her damp black curls clung to her skull like a cap made of delicate lace. "Let's rest," she panted. "Did you have any idea the desert would be this pretty?"

"No," said Verna. "My boss does know something after all, picking out this spot. You know sometimes I think he's so dumb, he wouldn't keep his job if I didn't take such good care of him."

"I'll bet," said Olga "just remember, kid, he told you about this land. From about a million acres, he found this section that is practically next door to the greatest winter resort in the desert."

Verna looked at the great canyon covered with grey-green plants that glistened in the bright sunshine. She turned back to her friend, "I'm hungry. Let's see if you unpacked the grub." Verna gathered up dead sticks of the sparse growth on the desert. "I'll build the fire, while you sit back and look at the scenery, and then you can fix breakfast."

They had stopped the car under a palos verde tree, its long lacy leaves like streamers fluttering in an almost indistinguishable breeze. The desert cove was located in a bowl surrounded by desert hills that ranged in color from the uninteresting desert brown to many shades of purple that seemed to follow the shadows of the canyon. The blue sky with lacy clouds was clear and serene, and a large hawk circled in the sky ... the watchdog of the desert.

"Wonder if that bird is looking to see if we are something dead that he can eat," Olga mused, slightly frightened and awed by the vast expanse of land and a silence so intense that it almost screamed. Suddenly she jumped aside and yelled in fright as a huge jackrabbit came out from under a rough cactus, and leaped across the desert clearing cactus and larrea that were almost 4 feet high.

"Whatsa matter?" panted Verna, who had wandered up the gully in search of dry rubbish, and raced back at Olga's scream.

"Oh, nothing," said Olga uncomfortably. "Something scared me"

Verna again turned to her wood gathering, but once more ran back when Olga screamed again, "It's a prehistoric monster," she cried, "I won't stay in this god-forsaken place."

Verna giggled as she saw the monster that had frightened Olga. "Prehistoric, baloney!" she said disgusted. "That's a lizard. There are a million of them around, and they won't hurt you."

The Cove (continued):

"H-how do you know?" stammered Olga.

"The boss has been telling me about everything up here. Everything is fine, and we aren't to be scared of nothing but rattle snakes and sidewinders."

"Rattle snakes?" Olga screeched.

"Uh-huh. Mr. Harlan said they'd warn us if they were going to strike, and we needn't be scared."

"Look, Verny, I'm going home. You didn't tell me nothing about rattle snakes when you got me up here."

"Ah, Olga, don't be a scaredy cat. Just think, we'll build our own cabin, and we won't have to worry about rattle snakes or nothing. Please don't get disgusted. Now get up and fix us some breakfast. I've made you a fire down in the gully. I'm starved. I'll look in the box and find my china cup."

Olga stood up slowly. "I never felt so well in my life," she stretched elaborately, "well, not since I grew up anyway. You know, usually at this time of the morning, I am groggy and want to go back to bed." She did a graceful little hot and her tight pants revealed a body as slight as a child. "I feel like eating a huge breakfast."

"You cook it and I'll eat it," said Verna, leaning against a rock as if it were a huge lounge chair. "Mr. Harlan told me how to find the center of this section, and from there we'll have to measure and find if this is really our piece of land. Gee, I hope I'm right. Harlan told me our piece had a tree on it, and that's about the only tree around here."

Olga made coffee and fried eggs over the fire that Verna has built by hollowing out a hole in the soft sand. Her attempts at toast resulted in charcoal, so Verna ate the burned bread and Olga ate one piece of bread.

The women stretched out in the shade under the tiny tree, and watched the white clouds idly floating in the clear blue sky. The big lizards sat on the rocks, evidently unmindful of the voices of the pair as they talked. Olga tossed a piece of bread in the direction of a creature that was almost two feet long, and it vanished under the rocks. As they lay quietly, a small lizard came out and seemed to be nibbling at the bread. The larger lizard walked to a waving yellow blossom, scooped the flower out of its cup and stolidly ate it, while the women lay frozen with delight at their first look at primitive nature. Soon Olga succumbed to the to the relaxed balminess of that shining day, and fell asleep. A shadow appeared on the rock and the lizard scampered under the rock.

"Tyhat coffee sure smells good," said a masculine voice.

Verna sat up abruptly, her ash blonde braids falling at her side like the traditional Wagnerian Isolde. Her mouth gaped in amazement as she gazed on a dark man dressed in immaculate shorts. He was naked to the waist.

"Oh, gee, did I scare you?" He said, "I'm sorry."

"Don't go away. I just wasn't expecting company to drop in," laughed Verna. "How would you like some coffee?"

"Sure would if you can spare it," said the man. "Wow, this is the hottest walk I've taken in my life."

Verna looked at the young man sharply, "Aren't you Nip Tyler?"

"Sure am," he laughed, "we're making a picture out yonder," he waved vaguely. "My agent told me he had a five acre piece out here and I told him I'd run a line for him."

Note: This chapter from Mrs. Schaak's fictional work gives us a picture of the desert as experienced by those who first brought civilization to the barren places.

FIREHOUSE YARD SALE

We are looking for high quality items to sell on November 3 and 4. Please contact Anne at the office for pick-ups. No clothing, shoes, large appliances, mattresses or bed pillow are wanted. We are selling an antique Murphy bed and a player piano to make room. If you know of anyone who might buy either one, bring them to the historic firehouse to see these great collectibles.

GRANTS AND ESTATE PLANNING

If you know of any foundations that could help our Society with grants, please contact us with the necessary information. We will work with anyone to set up donations from their estates to help perpetuate our programs and events. Please remember the Historical Society in your estate planning. Also if you would like to remember a friend by giving a gift in their memory, the Society will appreciate this kind of donation.

VIETNAM MEMORIAL

This beautiful memorial which is located in the front yard of Society headquarters is sometimes overlooked. Docents should make sure that visitors to the museum are shown this memorial.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 19, Monday	"Jean Benson -- Citizen of the Year"	Desert Willow	6 pm
March 23, Friday	Lecture: Ghost Mountain Chronicles	Historical Society	7 pm
March 25, Sunday	Ed Mullins Picnic in the Park	Pavilion in Park	11:30 am
April 18, Wednesday	Spring Luncheon - 50s & 60s Pioneer Women	PDCC Club House	11:30 am
April 13, Friday	Senior Awards - Hal Rover honored	Esmeralda Resort	11:30 am
April 27, Friday	Lecture: Bradshaw Trail	Historical Society	7 pm
May 19, Saturday	Founder's Day - Birgit Moller / Palm Awards	City Hall Chambers	2-4 pm
June 30, Saturday	Keedy's Grill - 50th anniversary	Keedy's Fountain & Grill	
	Historical Society - 30 anniversary	Free cake & beverage	1-4 pm
June 30, Saturday	Society Museum closes for summer	(July & August)	
Sept. 1, Saturday	Society Museum reopens	Historical Society	10 am-3 pm
	Wine & Cheese Party	Historical Society	3-5 pm
Oct. 17, Wednesday	Fall Luncheon	(undetermined)	11:30 am
Oct. 28, Sunday	Golf Cart Parade	El Paseo	1 pm
Nov. 3 & 4, Sat/Sun.	Firehouse Yard Sale	Historical Society	7:30am-1:30pm
Nov. 11, Sunday	Veterans Day - Freedom Park Dedication	Freedom Park	11 am
Nov. 30, Friday	Holiday Wreath Lighting/Ornament Contest	Visitor's Center	5:30 pm

A commonly accepted origin of **April Fool's Day** involves the changing of the calendar. At one time, the New Year celebration began on March 25 and ended on April 1. However, in 1582 King Charles IX adopted the Gregorian calendar and accepted the beginning of the New Year as January 1. Those who refused to acknowledge the new date or simply forgot, received foolish gifts and invitations to non-existent parties. The butt of such a prank was known as an "April fish" or "April fool."

Ginny & Dick Folkers, Hourglass Editors

Historical Society of Palm Desert
P. O. Box 77
Palm Desert, CA 92261